

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Christ's church and Its Pattern

In this article we will discuss the "church" Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:16-19). Upon Simon Peter's confession to Jesus that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus responded to Peter saying, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." When Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, brought him to Jesus, Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas [which is translated Peter]" (John 1:40-42). Cephas is Aramaic for a "stone." The Greek for Peter is petros, which is a "stone." Jesus did not say, or mean to say, that His church would be built upon a "stone," but upon this rock which is a solid "ledge of rock" Jesus used the Greek word "petra" which describes this ledge of rock. It is clear from the context of these verses that Jesus, by using the term "petra," referred to the truth that Peter had just confessed, which was the deity of Jesus.

When Jesus said, "I will build My church," the future tense is used which shows that at this time Jesus had not established His church. It was only in a preparatory stage, and was yet to be established. This is the first instance of the use of the word "church" in the New Testament. "Church" is derived from the Greek word "ekklasia." The Greek preposition "ek," means out, and "kaleo," means to call; therefore, "ekklasia" means called out of the world. Here "My church" means the assembly or people who have been called out of the world by the gospel of Christ.

Jesus said He would give Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" which describes the church as a kingdom. Jesus told Peter that He would give him the terms, or conditions, of admitting people into the church which Peter exercised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41). Jesus Christ described Himself as the one "who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (Rev. 3:7). Peter also announced the terms of admission for the Gentiles into the church (Acts Chapter 10:34-48, 11:1).

The "church" that Jesus promised to build has a particular New Testament pattern. If a church today is not following that pattern, then it is not the church Jesus said He would build. Rather, it is a man-made organization. Notice in Matthew 16:18 the singular, possessive pronoun "My" is used. Paul explained this pattern, plan, and form of the church when he said, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that FORM of teaching to which you were committed" (Romans 6:17). Paul also told Timothy, an evangelist, to "Retain the standard [pattern] of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13).

Paul called Christians who are members of Christ's church, to follow a "moral pattern." Christians are called to live a life worthy of imitation. Models of this pattern include the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 11:1). Evangelists were called by Paul to follow this moral pattern: "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12). All Christians are to show themselves to be "an example of good deeds, with purity and doctrine" (Titus 2:7).

There is also a "technical pattern" for the church to follow. Moses was told to build the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness "according to the pattern which he had seen" (Acts 7:44). The writer of Hebrews explains the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" as being the spiritual church. The tabernacle that Moses built according to the pattern given to him on the mountain, was to "serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things [the spiritual church]." This spiritual church was to be built according to the pattern we now have in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:2, 5-7).

If there is a New Testament church in the 21st century, there must be a pattern revealed in the New Testament by which that church can be identified and reproduced. We will discuss this pattern principle in next week's article.

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